

Red wine researcher accused of falsifying data

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A University of Connecticut researcher known for his work on red wine's benefits to cardiovascular health falsified his data in more than 100 instances, university officials said Wednesday.

UConn officials said nearly a dozen scientific journals are being warned of the potential problems after publishing his studies in recent years.

The researcher, Dr. Dipak Das, did some studies of resveratrol, an ingredient in [red wine](#) that has shown potential for promoting health.

But Dr. Nir Barzilai, whose research team conducts resveratrol research at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, told The Associated Press that Das is not a major figure in the field. The new allegations will not make a material difference to resveratrol research, which is being conducted extensively around the world with encouraging results from many labs, Barzilai said.

Enthusiasm in the potential health benefits from [red wine](#) grew after a widely reported study in 2006 in which obese mice lived longer, healthier lives after getting resveratrol. Das was not involved in that research.

UConn officials said their internal review found 145 instances over seven years in which Das fabricated, falsified and manipulated data, and the U.S. Office of Research Integrity has launched an independent investigation of his work.

It wasn't immediately known Wednesday whether the irregularities in Das' research were significant enough to alter the conclusions.

Das is director of UConn Health Center's Cardiovascular Research Center. Eleven scientific research journals that have published Das' work are being notified of the problems, which came to light after a three-year review sparked by an anonymous complaint in 2008 of potential irregularities in his research.

"We have a responsibility to correct the scientific record and inform peer researchers across the country," Philip Austin, interim vice president for [health affairs](#), said in a written statement about the notifications to the 11 [scientific journals](#).

The university's health center recently declined to accept \$890,000 in federal grants awarded to Das as its review was under way, and has frozen all other external funding for his lab.

Dismissal proceedings have also been launched against Das, who has been employed by the Health Center since 1984 and was granted tenure in 1993. Das could not immediately be reached Wednesday, and messages were left for him through the union representing him.

Das' other specialty areas besides resveratrol include medicines derived from plants, the molecular structure of plants and herbs and their effect on heart disease, and a nutrient found in Vitamin E that has shown promise fighting free radicals.

He also gained attention in 2009 after publishing a study that concluded crushed garlic provided protection for heart health than processed garlic.

The U.S. Office of Research Integrity received the anonymous tip about potential irregularities in a paper by Das about resveratrol and notified

UConn, which set up a special review committee that reviewed six years' worth of his work.

Its report found what it called "a pervasive attitude of disregard within the (lab)" for commonly accepted scientific practices.

It also said there were so many problems - and over so many years - that the review board members "can only conclude that they were the result of intentional acts of data falsification and fabrication, designed to deceive."

Some examples included several cases in which data was digitally altered; data from one experiment was used to justify findings in another; and controls from one experiment were used to denote another experiment's controls, which are the unchanged factors against which experiments are compared.

Austin, the UConn health affairs vice president, said they are "deeply disappointed by the flagrant disregard" for UConn's conduct codes, but grateful that the anonymous tipster notified authorities.

"The abuses in one lab do not reflect the overall performance of the Health Center's biomedical research enterprise, which continues to pursue advances in treatments and cures with the utmost of integrity," Austin said. "We demand full compliance with all research standards and policies by our faculty and staff."

The disclosure comes less than a week after Connecticut authorities finalized an agreement with a Maine-based lab to build a genomic research facility at the UConn Health Center in Farmington as part of a broader plan to expand the medical and dental schools and boost research.

Das' research pre-dates those plans by several years, and is not directly part of the genomic research program.

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